



NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



VIETNAM VETERANS TO CLEAN WAR MEMORIALS IN PIERRE

The Pierre Vietnam/ERA Veterans Association (VEVA) has planned a Capitol Lake War Memorial cleanup beginning at 9:00 AM on Saturday, May 12, 2018. This group faithfully meets every year, rain or shine, to prepare the site for the Memorial Day weekend.

"The organization plans to clean and polish all the memorials and the Flaming Fountain at Capitol Lake," said VEVA President Ken Rausch. "Our group will also be picking up trash and power washing memorials and sidewalks."

Rausch is a combat Vietnam Veteran and retired E-7 from the South Dakota National Guard. Rausch said, "This is a great project for Vietnam /ERA Veterans and their families to gather and show support for the SD Veterans Memorial in Pierre and pay respects to our brothers and sisters who were killed in Vietnam and other wars."

In 2013, the organization sponsored the project for the first time with over 50 area Vietnam Veterans, Vietnam ERA Veterans and their families participating.

At 11:00 AM, Vietnam Veterans, families and public will gather at the SD Vietnam Wall for a brief ceremony for the South Dakotans who were killed in Vietnam.

Sponsors for this event include VEVA, Olson Plumbing, Beck Motors, and Dakota Radio Group.

Cleaners are encouraged to wear an article of clothing identifying them as a Vietnam or Vietnam ERA Veteran. Participating Vietnam/ERA Veterans will receive a new South Dakota Vietnam Veteran cap.

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NATIONAL MILITARY APPRECIATION MONTH

At the encouragement of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs and the South Dakota Department of the Military, Gov. Dennis Daugaard has proclaimed May as "National Military Appreciation Month," a time for all to honor, remember, recognize and appreciate those who have served in the past, those now serving, as well as their families.

"The vigilance of the members of the Armed Forces has been instrumental to the preservation of freedom, security and prosperity enjoyed by the people of this great nation," the Governor's proclamation states. "The success of the Armed Forces depends on the dedicated service of its members and their families."

National Military Appreciation Month includes: Loyalty Day on May 1, Victory in Europe Day on May 8, Military Spouse Appreciation Day on May 11, Armed Forces Day on May 19 and Memorial Day on May 28.

"Every American citizen is indebted to the women and men who have served this nation in uniform; earning and preserving the rights we take for granted every day," said Maj. Gen. Tim Reisch,

Adjutant General of the South Dakota National Guard. "We also owe a debt of gratitude to our military family members, without whom that service would be impossible."

The days provide an opportunity to honor, remember, recognize, and appreciate those who serve and have served. These men and women continue to play a major role in the development of our country; documented through a history of uncompromising honor, dedication to duty and genuine love of country.

"Life is all about timing," said Larry Zimmerman, Secretary of the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs. "The month of May is our time to recognize our military, veterans and their families. They are serving, have served, or stood beside those service members everyday of their career. Let's remember these heroes every day for what they do, as service to this great country is a part of their daily lives."



VETERANS CHOICE PROGRAM

The following is a statement by VA Acting Secretary Robert Wilkie on Congressional Action on Veterans Choice Program.

(Under President Trump, the VA has benefitted from some of the most significant legislative reforms in the history of the department. With funding for VA's Choice program set to run out soon, America's veterans need Congress to come together to support this crucial program and pass legislation that will make it permanent. There is simply no denying how vital community providers are to the VA's mission, as the Choice program accounts for an average of more than 30,000 appointments per day, and allows veterans to get care when and where they need it. Without community care, the VA's ability to provide timely, high quality health care to veterans will be dramatically diminished. The VA, along with the White House, commend Congress's dedication to finding a long term solution to the Choice Program. We are looking forward to working closely with Chairman Roe and House Leadership in the coming weeks to advance this legislation through the House of Representatives. We cannot wait any longer.

Decisive action must be taken in order to deliver on our promise to our veterans. They deserve the best healthcare options available, and a permanent Choice program will give them that.

That's why we're calling on Congress to come together on a bipartisan basis to complete this critical mission for our nation's Veterans.)

HONORING OUR WW II HEROES

Davison and Turner County Veterans Service Officers continue to reach out to World War II Veterans and recognize their service.

Davison County VSO Craig Bennett joined this family in recognizing one of our World War II heroes.

Tom Sparrow continues to allocate part of his shopping time in Sioux Falls to honor World War II heroes.

A special thanks to all our VSOs for honoring these heroes!



DAV STATE CONVENTION

SDDVA West Region Field Officer Will Huffmon, attended the Disabled American Veterans Annual State Convention at the Lodge in Deadwood.

Huffmon served as a panelist in the Veterans Town Hall Forum. Will was joined by Jesse Blankenship of the Sioux Falls VA Regional Benefits Office, Director Sandra Horsman of the VA Black Hills Heath Care System, Jesse Ewing of Senator John Thune's Office, Jeff Marlette of Senator Mike Rounds Office, and Brad Otten of Representative Kristi Noem's Office. The Town Hall was moderated by Owen Richards, National Service Officer for the DAV, out of Sioux Falls.

Huffmon, as well as the other representatives, gave updates on their successes, current initiatives, and upcoming issues. He stressed that our successes are garnered by our partnerships with the VA, veterans service organizations, congressional representatives, and the veterans themselves.

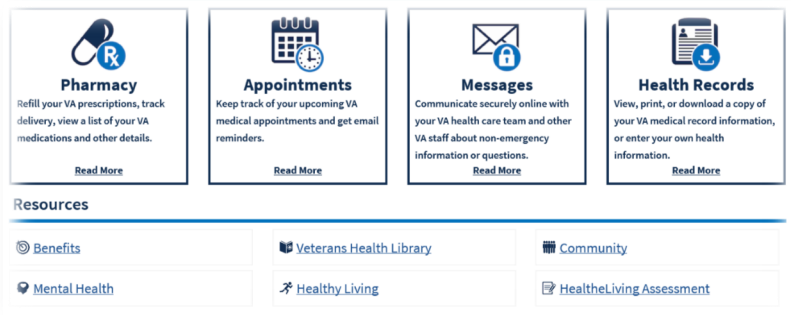
Questions to the panel focused on access to benefits, health care, legislative progress on veteran bills in congress, and other topics.

"Opportunities to bring all the stakeholders in veteran's advocacy and service together, such as this Town Hall, should be taken as often as possible," said Huffmon. "It is a unique rewarding format where all the partners are present. Our collective experience and specialties of each organizations and the comradery between us clearly show veterans that we are all equally accountable and passionate in serving our veterans. We are all pieces of a larger team in serving veterans."



NEW VA FEATURE ALLOWS VETERANS TO ACCESS MEDICAL IMAGES ONLINE

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently released a new online feature through the [My HealtheVet](#) portal that allows Veterans to access their medical images and associated study reports online. Called VA Medical Images and Reports, the feature allows veterans with a premium account to view, download and share copies of their radiology studies, such as X-rays, mammograms, MRIs and CTs, from the VA Electronic Health Record (EHR).



“With VA Medical Images and Reports, patients have the option of obtaining their images and reports online, eliminating the need to visit a VA facility to acquire a copy of their information,” said VA Acting Secretary Robert Wilkie. “This feature aligns with [VA Blue Button’s](#) concept, which simplifies patient access to their personal health information by allowing them to retrieve it securely online.”

Veterans can view a list of accessible radiology studies, which are available in My HealtheVet, three calendar days after the study report has been verified. When a request for a specific study is completed, veterans can view a lower resolution

thumbnail copy of the images and the associated radiology report online, or download a zip file that contains the report and diagnostic quality images.

For studies with large files, veterans can choose to receive an email notification when the download request is complete.

To view diagnostic quality ([Digital Imaging and Communication in Medicine or DICOM](#)) images, veterans may install a free medical image viewer on their computer to view DICOM image files. The images and reports may be copied to a CD, DVD, USB flash drive, or any portable drive of their choice to share with providers, both outside of VA and across VA settings of care.



VA VIDEO CONNECT EXPANDS VETERANS' ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

More and more veterans are receiving health-care treatment virtually, thanks to efforts by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to expand telehealth.

One of the recent successes has been with VA Video Connect, which allows veterans to connect with their health-care teams over live video from a computer, tablet or smart phone from the comfort of their homes, thereby increasing their access to VA health care and reducing travel times.

Since its launch in August 2017, more than 20,000 veterans have used VA Video Connect to receive care, and currently more than 4,000 VA providers across the country are set up to use the system.

"We are taking big steps to make VA health care more accessible," said VA Acting Secretary Robert Wilkie. "VA Video Connect provides our veterans with a convenient option to connect with their providers from their preferred locations in the United States."

VA Video Connect also has proven to be an important tool for VA after emergencies. The Office of Connected Care's mobile and telehealth programs, in coordination with the Michael E. DeBakey VA Medical Center (VAMC) in Houston and VA's regional network, quickly organized telehealth capabilities to assist veterans at two "[mega-shelters](#)" and four community based outpatient clinics after Hurricane Harvey in 2017.

As part of that effort, remote clinicians used VA Video Connect and other video technologies to hold virtual health-care appointments with veterans. VA teams have been coordinating since last year's hurricane season to prepare for how VA Video Connect can be used to mobilize clinical resources in the face of future emergencies and disasters.

VA Video Connect can be used on almost any computer, tablet or mobile phone with an internet connection, a web camera and microphone. VA Video Connect uses encryption to ensure privacy in each session.

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In March 2018, VA released an iOS version of VA Video Connect to the Apple App Store. Soon after, VA Video Connect began trending as a top 10 app in the "medical" category.

"The response from patients has been incredible," said Dr. Margaret Carrico, a VA primary care provider based at VAMC, Tampa. "Overall, they are delighted. Because wherever they are, they don't have to come in here to see me. Their daughter doesn't have to get off work, or they don't have to drive in traffic."

To learn more about VA Video Connect, visit the VA App Store at mobile.va.gov/appstore.



WARRANT OFFICER OF THE YEAR

A Mitchell man was announced as this year's South Dakota National Guard Warrant Officer of the Year at its annual officer's conference in Brookings, April 22.

Chief Warrant Officer 2 Joshua Brenden, Company B, 139th Brigade Support Battalion, received the Chief Warrant Officer 4 Michael F. O'Connor Award, which was established to recognize the most outstanding warrant officer in the SDNG based on exceptional qualities of technical knowledge, leadership, dedication and initiative.

Brenden serves as the engineer equipment maintenance warrant responsible for overall maintenance for the company, as well as contributing support to the 139th Battalion.

The competitors were further evaluated on their accomplishments over the past year and how technically proficient they are at their jobs - even though Army warrant officers are technical experts in their specialized fields, they also help with training soldiers and advising commanders.

Brenden enlisted in 2000 and earned his commission in 2011. He previously served on active duty helping units prepare for overseas service, and it was those experiences that helped set him apart from his competitors.

"Having the mentorship of the leaders above me to facilitate my career and to let me reach the goals I have in mind has been a big part of winning this award," said Brenden. "I want to use the information I have learned to train soldiers around the state on the systems that I work with and meet readiness goals for the South Dakota National Guard."

Brenden uses his personal experiences to bring positive changes to the SDNG's use of property books and maintenance tracking.

"I have been working with our team to train soldiers on new programs brought out by the Army that will help streamline maintenance issues," said Brenden.

On the civilian side, Brenden is active in his community and volunteers with the United Way, Boy Scouts of America, Future Farmers of America and the Mitchell Soccer Association. He is married to his wife, Tiffany, and they have two daughters.

Other warrant officers representing their major command for this year's award competition were Chief Warrant Officer 3 Gene Fisher, Joint Force Headquarters, and Chief Warrant Officer 4 John Schneider, 109th Regional Support Group.



LIEUTENANT OF THE YEAR

A Rapid City man was announced as this year's South Dakota National Guard Lieutenant of the Year at its annual officer's conference in Brookings, April 22.

1st Lt. Jason Becker, Headquarters Battery, 1-147th Field Artillery Battalion, received the Lt. Col. John J. Steele Award, which was established in 1968 to annually recognize the most outstanding lieutenant in the SDNG based on exceptional qualities of leadership, values and performance.

Becker serves as a physician's assistant and contributes to soldier medical readiness for the battalion. His efforts helped to increase the overall medical readiness of the 1-147th to over 93 percent.

Becker said his experiences as an enlisted soldier contribute to his success as an officer and strengthened his ability to form relationships with soldiers in his unit.

"I had an advantage of being prior enlisted for eight years," said Becker. "That helped me understand some of the ground-level strategies, as well as being in the field artillery, where we are constantly in a state of readiness.

"As an officer, the reward is not only about gaining respect, but you also know how it feels when you ask for tasks to be completed," Becker added. "I think that helps make missions go a lot better."

He credits his success in the competition to understanding how soldiers are responsible for being ready for all of their mission essential tasks.

"You need to remember how to do tasks that are not just a part of your specific job in the military," said Becker. "The bigger picture is to help develop better Soldiers in general."

In addition to his responsibilities in the National Guard, Becker serves as a physician's assistant with Black Hills Orthopedic and Spine Center as the primary surgical team lead.

His professionalism as an orthopedic physician's assistant called him away, unexpectedly, from the award ceremony as he was tasked with operating on a patient in need back home.

"No matter what the problem or where my team is, I will try to take care of our patients," said Becker. Other officers representing their major command for this year's award competition were 1st Lt. Scott Birr, 114th Fighter Wing, and 1st Lt. Dacey Eggers, 109th Regional Support Group.



VETERAN WHOLE HEALTH & BENEFITS FAIR

**May 17, 2018
3:00pm-4:30pm**

**VFW Post 1273
420 Main Street, Rapid City**

You are invited to attend the VA Whole Health and Benefits Fair. VA representatives will be available to discuss claims for compensation benefits, enrollment in health care, and eligibility for burial benefits.

Participate in live demonstrations of chair yoga, Tai Chi, health coaching, goal setting, mindful eating and more! Learn about cutting edge telehealth options in VA healthcare.

We want to hear from Veterans and their families. Bring your questions or concerns and learn more about the benefits you've earned.



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U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
Black Hills Health Care System

OPERATION PATRIOT BANDOLEER

A South Dakota Army National Guard unit transported shipping containers of retrograde ammunition from California to depots in Nevada and Utah as part of Operation Patriot Bandoleer during their annual training in March.

Soldiers of the Milbank-based 740th Transportation Company, and its detachment in Aberdeen, supported U.S. Army munitions readiness requirements while enhancing knowledge and skills throughout the operation.

OPB is a multi-component logistic event that supports the Army pre-positioned stocks program, involving the movement of thousands of tons of munitions and war reserve material.

Collectively, Guard units from seven states moved 483 containers, primarily from the Military Ocean Terminal Concord (MOTCO), California, to six different depots and arsenals across the nation.

The 740th hauled 60 of the containers from MOTCO to the Hawthorne Army Depot, Nevada, and Tooele Army Depot, Utah, experiencing numerous variables and challenges on the way.

Aside from road time, OPB provided hands-on training ranging from logistical planning and loading operations to maintenance support and command and control.

Upon completing their OPB mission, the 740th stopped at Camp Guernsey, Wyoming, on their way home where the unit conducted tactical training lanes where mission essential tasks ranging from tactical convoys to performing field maintenance where evaluated.

By the time the 740th arrived back home, they had logged more than 300,000 combined miles on their M-915 semi-tractor trailers.



UPCOMING EVENTS

May 8—SFVAHCS Baby Shower
May 10—VABHHCS Baby Shower
May 11—AHEC Improving Veterans Care Conference—University Center—Sioux Falls
May 11—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Domiciliary Auditorium—Hot Springs —10:00 am (MT)
May 19—MOPH State Convention—DAV Headquarters in Sioux Falls—10:00 am (CT)
May 22—SDDVA Mini Conference via Skype—10:00 am (CT)
May 24-25—PVA Disabled Veterans Fishing Tournament—Chamberlain
Jun 7-10—American Legion State Convention—Spearfish
Jun 14-17—VFW State Convention—Sioux Falls
Jul 7—Veterans for Veterans Annual Poker Run—Mitchell Depot—1:00 pm (CT)
Jul 11—South Dakota Veterans Council Meeting—PVA Headquarters—Sioux Falls—10:00 am (CT)
Jul 12—Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate Cemetery Grand Opening—Sisseton—11:00 am (CT)
Jul 13 —VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Education Classroom—Fort Meade—10:00 am (MT)
Jul 14-17—DAV National Convention—Reno, NV
Jul 21-25—VFW National Convention—Kansas City, MO
Jul 26—VABHHCS Veterans Town Hall—Post 8 American Legion—Pierre
Aug 20-24—SDDVA Benefits School—Ramkota—Pierre
Aug 24-30—American Legion National Convention—Minneapolis, MN
Sept 14—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—VFW Post 1273—Rapid City—10:00 am (MT)
Oct 10—SD Veterans Commission Meeting—Soldiers and Sailors Building—Pierre—8:00 am (CT)
Nov 16—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Domiciliary Auditorium—Hot Springs —10:00 am (MT)



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